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**The Secretariat**

## **Current education issues in Central Asia**

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# Table of Contents:

EDUCATION IN CENTRAL ASIA .....	4
OVERVIEW .....	4
EDUCATION IN TAJIKISTAN .....	7
INTRODUCTION .....	7
EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND SYSTEM .....	7
INTERNATIONAL ACTORS INVOLVED IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR .....	9
EDUCATION IN KYRGYZSTAN .....	10
INTRODUCTION .....	10
EDUCATION SYSTEM .....	10
INSTRUCTION .....	11
CURRICULUM .....	12
HIGHER EDUCATION .....	12
INTERNATIONAL ACTORS INVOLVED IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR .....	13
EDUCATION IN KAZAKHSTAN .....	14
INTRODUCTION .....	14
ACCESS TO EDUCATION .....	15
<i>Access for minorities</i> .....	15
STRUCTURE OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM .....	16
<i>Pre-school (from 5 to 6 years)</i> .....	16
<i>Secondary general school (from 6 to 17 years)</i> .....	16
<i>Higher Education</i> .....	16
<i>Post-graduate Education</i> .....	16
QUALITY OF EDUCATION .....	17
INTERNATIONAL ACTORS INVOLVED IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR .....	17
EDUCATION IN TURKMENISTAN .....	20
INTRODUCTION .....	20
ACCESS TO EDUCATION .....	21
<i>Access for minorities</i> .....	21
STRUCTURE OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM .....	21
<i>Pre-school years (from 2-7 years)</i> .....	21
<i>Secondary General Education (from 7 to 16 years)</i> .....	21
<i>Higher Education</i> .....	21
QUALITY OF EDUCATION .....	22
INTERNATIONAL ACTORS INVOLVED IN THE REGION .....	23
EDUCATION IN UZBEKISTAN .....	26
INTRODUCTION .....	26
ACCESS TO EDUCATION .....	27
<i>Access for minorities</i> .....	27
<i>Gender equality of access</i> .....	27
SCHOOL ATTENDANCE .....	28
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION .....	28
EDUCATION SYSTEM .....	28
<i>Pre-school education</i> .....	28
<i>Basic (grade 1 to 9) and Secondary Education</i> .....	29
<i>Higher Education</i> .....	29
QUALITY OF EDUCATION .....	29
INTERNATIONAL ACTORS INVOLVED IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR .....	30

*On sources.*

*This background paper is a compilation based on various open sources of information. The main sources consist of public reports as well as Internet resources, in particular web pages of a variety of international and regional organisations involved in the region, both governmental and non-governmental, and official web pages of the Central Asian Governments. The majority of the data has been compiled using the most up dated statistics available, but some of them might not exactly reflect the current situation.*

# EDUCATION IN CENTRAL ASIA

## Overview

Since the beginning of the Helsinki process the issues of ensuring equal access to education, the preservation of the cultural heritage of minorities and the promotion of tolerance and democratic values have all become part of the OSCE mandate. In 1999 education and culture were both officially given a new dimension in the context of conflict prevention within the OSCE. Additionally, at the 1999 Review Conference<sup>1</sup>, the Summit held in Istanbul<sup>2</sup>, and the International Conference on Enhancing Security and Stability in Central Asia<sup>3</sup>, the OSCE Participating States further committed themselves to promote and emphasise the importance of tolerance, to counter any form of aggressive nationalism, to build pluralistic societies where all may enjoy equal opportunity and to make a better use of cultural tools to ensure stability, all with a particular focus on the CA region. For decades before independence, the CA countries, as part of the former Soviet Union, enjoyed nearly universal access to education with a relatively high standard at all levels; teachers had appropriate qualifications and physical facilities were generally maintained in good condition, with only a small disparity between rural and urban schools. The severe economic crisis that followed the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991 forced the governments of the new CA Republics to adopt austerity measures and to cut expenditures, particularly in education and social services. Economic contraction was compounded by a decline in real wages of teachers, and pressures to adapt to the changing social and economic needs during the transition to a market-based economy were high. As a result, education systems have dramatically deteriorated and the quality of education has steeply declined. In the mid-90s, the governments undertook a number of reforms aimed at decentralising the education management, diversifying its funding, developing innovative institutions and curricula, as well as increasing teacher's salaries and social sector spending. Recently<sup>4</sup> CA representatives from the Ministries of Education, from educational scientific research and from public institutions and NGOs met in Bishkek with the aim of defining an effective strategy that will generate dialogue between the education policy makers of CA and support the commitment to achieve the EFA standard (UNESCO-Education for All) by 2015. Despite this, all the education systems in CA face several challenges and, with slight differences from one country to another, all are of serious concern. In particular, equal and universal access to education is not fully ensured; school attendance, particularly by girls, has dropped; state budgets allocated to education are low; there is a lack of qualified teachers, textbooks and school facilities; and corruption is increasing at many levels in the system.

The declining state of education in all five CA countries is therefore a major concern, not least because education can play such a key role in a state's stability. Education systems that

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<sup>1</sup> *OSCE Review Conference, Vienna-Istanbul, 1999; Chapter IV: Review of the implementation of all OSCE principles and commitments, "Culture and education, cultural heritage, human contacts, treatment of citizens of other Participating States"*.

<sup>2</sup> *Istanbul OSCE Summit, 1999; Chapters: I, para 6; III, paras 19, 23.*

<sup>3</sup> *International Conference on enhancing Security and stability in Central Asia: Strengthening Comprehensive Efforts to Counter Terrorism, Bishkek, December 2001; Programme of Action, paras 7, 11, 12, 13.*

<sup>4</sup> *The second Education Forum for Central Asian Republics and Kazakhstan (CARK), June 2003, Bishkek.*

guarantee universal access to a high standard of education, and serve the needs of changing economic, social and political conditions, provide states with the talent and skills needed to raise their economic base. In so doing they ensure a generally higher standard of living which in turn assists in preventing social discontent and a rise in criminality. Education, particularly in multiethnic and multicultural societies, as found in the CA countries, also serves as a tool to transmit cultural values, to promote tolerance, democracy, equality and respect for human rights, all of which are also seen as a means to combat extremism.

Currently the CA countries are facing tremendous challenges. Poorly performing economies, unrepresentative and rigid political structures, a failure to develop regional co-operation in a wide range of key issues; high levels of unemployment; young and rapidly growing populations with limited prospects for work and good healthcare. All these factors, together with the dire situation found in the education system, threaten to undermine stability in the region and to directly affect the security and prosperity of these OSCE member states.

It is envisaged that the establishment of the OSCE Academy in Bishkek is a first step to fulfil the OSCE commitments in the field of education and culture. However, there is still an urgent need for more active involvement of the OSCE in this sector, not least because the Council of Europe, one of the most relevant regional actors engaged in promoting education, tolerance and human rights, does not have a mandate for involvement in the CA region.

A number of regional options could be considered, by which the OSCE could jointly play a role, together with other IOs and NGOs, in the field of education in CA. These include:

1. To draw the issue of education to the attention of the respective CA governments and the relevant IOs active in this field in the region, by organising a high level event centred on education, with a particular focus on access to the subject. This could take place in Tashkent in March 2004 and could be aimed at further mobilising the interest in the issue, as well as promoting the activities currently carried out by the IOs. Among these are:
  - Assistance to the Ministries of Education of the 5 countries in planning and implementing reforms of their education systems, and in particular focussing on basic educational issues such as:
    - (a) gender equality in access to schools, particularly in rural areas, as well as in higher level education institutions;
    - (b) multiethnic schools, and the integration of minorities;
    - (c) enrolment of children from low income families.
  - Assistance with the rehabilitation of school facilities, with a particular focus on rural schools.
  - Assistance in mobilising support to promote gender equality in access to schools.
2. Supporting/implementing/developing projects, jointly with other relevant IOs, concerned with the publishing of textbooks and teaching methodology materials for schools, with a particular focus on tolerance, human rights, human conflicts, history, computer science and foreign languages.
3. Organising seminars and conferences where OSCE staff could directly contribute on conflict prevention, gender issues, human rights and good governance in schools, as well as organising (or co-organising) cultural events. In particular OSCE Centres in the region could establish links with relevant higher education institutions.

4. Taking advantage of the establishment of the OSCE Academy as a means to develop and enhance regional co-operation in the field of education.
5. To develop local projects to support higher education institutions and universities through i.e. the opening of resource centres and the provision of material assistance (computers, IT technology, etc.)

## EDUCATION IN TAJIKISTAN

<b>Population</b>	6,863,752
<b>Population growth rate</b>	2,13%
<b>Ethnic groups</b>	Tajik 64.9% Uzbek 25% Russian 3.5% (declining because of emigration) other 6.6%
<b>Religions</b>	Sunni Muslim 85% Shi'a Muslim 5%
<b>Languages</b>	Tajik (official) Russian (widely used in government and business)
<b>Literacy (age 15 and over can read and write)</b>	Total pop.: 99.4% male: 99.6% female:99.1%

Source: CIA, *The World Fact Book*, August 2003.

### **Introduction**

After more than 10 years of independence Tajikistan continues to suffer economically from the consequences of the civil war of the early nineties. In terms of per capita GNP, Tajikistan ranks as the poorest of the new republics in Central Asia. As an indication of the decline of the economy, the state budget in 2003 will be about one tenth of what it was in 1990. With government revenues in 2003 forecast at only 637 million somoni (about US\$ 212 million), and spending amounting to 655 million somoni (about US\$ 218 million), it is clear that the state has limited room for investment in development. UNDP has estimated, on the basis of World Bank figures, that more than 80 % of Tajiks live below the poverty line. Registered unemployment stands at less than three per cent, but according to UNDP statistics the real unemployment rate is likely to be closer to 40%. State budgets allocated to education are declining, and according to IMF figures only 2 per cent of GDP goes to education. The population of the country has increasing rapidly – in 2003 it did so by an estimated 2.1%, which results in– about 40% of the country being of school age. This in turn means that there will be heavy demographic induced pressure on the school system for the next decade, with the result that schools may need to run several shifts.

### **Educational policy and system**

The government is facing a series of challenges in developing an educational system inherited from the Soviet-period. In the last decade the system has come close to collapse, with school enrolment shrinking from close to 100 % in 1990 to just 61% in 2001.<sup>5</sup> In one area surveyed, as many as 45 % of children did not go to school regularly.<sup>6</sup> Experts suggest that illiteracy has seen a large, albeit unrecorded, surge.

<sup>5</sup> UN Human Development Report

<sup>6</sup> ICG Interview, CARE, Dushanbe

The availability and right to all forms of basic education are guaranteed by the Constitution of Tajikistan, under the 1994 Law “About education” and through obligations to the UN Convention on the rights of the children, signed in 1993. In 1997, the government accepted a resolution by which standards of general secondary education were established. The government has also adopted a majority of the Millennium Development Goals, including “Education for All”, as targets in its Poverty Reduction Strategy. The plan, has meant that the government has increased teacher salaries, and it also aims to increase social sector spending. However, the main aim is to prevent a further flight abroad of qualified teachers, in itself a crucial challenge to the system. This Strategy document containing these measures was submitted to Parliament for endorsement at the end of 2002.

In 1993 the Tajik Government ratified the Convention on Liquidation of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, on the basis that education is one of the optimal means to promote equality and eliminate gender discrimination throughout the country.

The Constitution requires that all children complete nine years of basic education. The state guarantees free entry into state educational institutions for general secondary education (11 classes), and secondary, professional, special and higher education. Education is by law conducted in 5 languages: Tajik, Uzbek, Russian, Kyrgyz and Turkmen. The state has devoted special attention to pre-school education, where there has been a drastic decline of enrolment the last ten years. In 1998 only 4.2% were brought up in such establishments. The quality and standards of pre-schools infrastructure is low -for instance 26 % are without central heating, and 23.9% are without a water supply.

An ICG report states that fewer children attend school today due to impoverishment, the poor quality of education and the lack of opportunity for advancement. Children in rural areas often help with farming chores, and girls in particular frequently do not progress beyond the initial classes.

Additionally, while education is officially free, many schools collect a fee to supplement the funds, underscoring the need for improved financing of the educational system. There is a severe lack of textbooks and other means of training, and the old textbooks are largely worn out and unsuitable for use. The university system suffers from much the same problem, and many students find that the curricula are irrelevant to today’s needs -students of economics emerge with little knowledge of market economy, for example. Reform in both content and structure is needed, and educational standards require revision if students and future employees are to be competitive with other CIS counterparts.

Responsibility for basic education has been devolved to the local level. Low salaries and a lack of status are the main reasons for qualified teachers to leave in large numbers. School teachers in provincial towns earn an average of 15-20 somoni (US\$ 5-6.5) each month. In order to compensate for the lack of teachers, many schools have double shifts, and people without higher education are hired to fill the posts.

UNESCO consider the current economic and social problems have led to a significant change in the situation in terms of gender equality to the disadvantage of women, and future society generally, illustrated by a sharp decrease in the number of girls attending further secondary or higher education after class 9. Tajikistan also faces the growing problem of street children, the number of which has significantly increased in post-conflict years and is becoming a



serious social problem. Another concern is the problems faced by refugee children returning to Tajikistan after years out of the system.

***International actors involved in the education sector***

<b>USAID</b>	Support conflict prevention and reforms in basic education (focus on 1-4 <sup>th</sup> grades), as well as more community involvement in education, curriculum development and teacher training, girls education, civic education programme, writing of textbooks, school infrastructure, training lawyers in human rights laws, training of modern municipal management techniques at the university of Central Asia
<b>Aga Khan Foundation</b>	Goal is to strengthen the study of humanities in the educational system. Curriculum development in content and material, and teacher training programmes, especially in the Gorno-Badakhshan Region.
<b>Asian Development Bank</b>	Assistance in expanding the qualitative basic education for all, restoration and rehabilitation of schools. Supports government reform, with emphasis on primary and secondary education. Aims are improvement of system efficiency; equitable access and completion and quality improvement, eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and to all levels of education no later than 2015.
<b>Islamic development Bank</b>	Rehabilitation of secondary schools.
<b>World bank</b>	Support managerial reform and capacity building, including modules for teacher retraining, and rehabilitation of educational facilities, prepare curricula and textbooks. Improve access to education
<b>SOROS foundation</b>	Provide grants and scholarships for higher education abroad, textbook development in secondary education, policy and strategy recommendation for Ministry of Education, English Language Programme.
<b>UNESCO</b>	Rehabilitation of schools
<b>UNICEF</b>	Provides technical assistance to develop in-service teachers training scheme and curriculum development.
<b>UNDP</b>	Rehabilitation of schools
<b>UNHCR</b>	Restoration of schools

## EDUCATION IN KYRGYZSTAN

<b>Population</b>	4,892,808 (July 2003)
<b>Population growth rate</b>	1.46% (2003)
<b>Ethnic groups</b>	Kyrgyz 52.4% Russian 18% Uzbek 12.9% Ukrainian 2.5% German 2.4% other 11.8%
<b>Religions</b>	Muslim 75% Russian Orthodox 20% other 5%
<b>Languages</b>	Kyrgyz (official) Russian (official) <i>note: in December 2001 Russian was made official language, with equal status to Kyrgyz</i>
<b>Literacy (age 15 and over can read and write)</b>	Total pop.: 97% male: 99% female: 96% (1989)

Source: CIA, *The World Fact Book*, August 2003.

### ***Introduction***

Kyrgyzstan is a country, which made a conscientious effort to educate all of its citizens before 1991, and continued to do so after that date. In the mid-1990s, the Soviet-era education system remained largely unchanged, but substantial structural and curriculum changes were underway by 1995. The 1993 constitution continues the Soviet guarantee of free basic education at state institutions to all citizens, and education is compulsory through to grade nine. Free education at the vocational, secondary specialised, and higher levels also continues to be offered by the state to qualified individuals. The fundamentals of post-Soviet education policy were enumerated in the 1992 law on education, which established the Ministry of Education as the central administrative body of the national system. Although Soviet-era statistics indicated that 100 percent of its citizens between the ages of nine and forty-nine were literate, the actual literacy rate was probably lower. The government seeks to attain UN EFA standards in education, and adopted the 'Bilim' programme in 1996, which set out the way ahead through to the year 2000. In addition, issues regarding accessibility and quality of education are being addressed by a number of other national programmes.

### ***Education System***

Following independence the Ministry of Education began working energetically to update the previous Soviet courses of study. The ministry is responsible for developing curricula, setting national standards and educational policy, developing certification examinations, and awarding degrees. It is divided into departments for general education, higher education, and material support. Below this institution control of education is devolved to the six provinces and the separate city of Bishkek, and representatives from each provide input to the ministry on local conditions. The level of basic local administration is the district (*rayon*), where the

district education officer is responsible for hiring faculties and appointing school inspectors and methodology specialists.

General education is financed from district budgets. College preparation and higher education programmes are financed from the national budget. In the case of general education school principals negotiate their requirements with district officials, but for higher education central government sets norms based on previous expenditures and on the relative resources found in the provinces. During the Soviet period, Kyrgyzstani schools were well financed but funding declined sharply from 1992, and since that time, insufficient funds in local budgets have forced the Ministry of Education to make special requests for support from the Ministry of Economics and Finance. This can be illustrated by the fact that in 1990 7.5% of GDP went on education, whereas in 1998 this had decreased to 5.0%. This situation has meant that the country has had to rely on considerable foreign assistance, most of which has been used to publish schoolbooks and to provide technical support for schools. In addition, various cultural organisations provide funding for private schools.

### ***Instruction***

General education has traditionally been accessible to nearly all children in Kyrgyzstan. In primary and secondary grades, about 51 percent of students are female, and this figure increases to 55 percent in higher education, with a converse majority of males in vocational programmes. There is little difference in school attendance between urban and rural areas or among the provinces. Higher education, however, has been much more accessible to the urban and wealthier segments of the population. Because of a shortage of schools, 37 percent of general education students attend schools that operate in two or three shifts per day. This is because construction of new facilities has lagged behind enrolment growth, the rate of which has been nearly 3 percent per year.

In line with the reforms of 1992, children start school at age six and are required to complete grade nine. The general education programme has three stages: grades one through four, grades five through nine, and grades ten and eleven. Students completing grade nine may continue into advanced or specialised (college preparatory) secondary curricula, or into a technical and vocational programme. The school year is thirty-four weeks long, extending from the beginning of September until the end of May. The instructional week is twenty-five hours long for grades one through four and thirty-two hours for grades five through eleven. About 960,000 students are enrolled in general education courses annually, with 42,000 in specialised secondary programmes, 49,000 in vocational programmes, and 58,000 in institutions of higher education. About 1,800 schools are in operation in Kyrgyzstan. The state system has about 65,000 teachers, but an estimated 8,000 teachers have resigned since 1992 because of poor salaries and a heavy workload that included double shifts for many.

Accessibility to education is estimated to have recently decreased considerably, especially for people with low incomes. Between 1993-1996 this decrease was most noted, with over 16500 children estimated as having stopped attending school. The main reason for this are seen as the increasing costs of education to pupils, the drop in status in certain parts of adult population making it more difficult for them to access education, an increasing lack of guidance from parents and guardians, and a lack of transport to assist with collection and delivery to and from schools in remote areas. In short, a population accustomed to free education was faced with the necessity to pay for certain education services. However, in 1997, following serious and rising non-attendance by children the government undertook a number of measures to encourage children back to schools, with the result that the problem in

now mainly limited to areas with large refugee concentrations. Funding though remains an ongoing concern. For example fewer than 10 % of schools are equipped with modern computers, with the result that schools are unable to use modern means of communication such as the Internet.

### ***Curriculum***

Some aspects of the government's post-Soviet curriculum reform have aroused controversy in Kyrgyzstan. In 1992 the first major curriculum reform provided for mandatory foreign language study (English, French, or German) beginning in grade one; computer science courses in grades eight through eleven (a programme hampered by lack of funds); and the replacement of Soviet ideology with concepts of market economy and ethnic studies. The reformed curriculum requirements also leave room for elective courses, and instructional innovation is encouraged.

A fundamental question though remains the language of instruction, which has become increasingly Kyrgyz as non-indigenous citizens leave the country and textbooks in Kyrgyz become available. The Ministry of Education held competitions, supported by foreign donations, for the design of new textbooks in Kyrgyz. This proved necessary, as prior to 1992 textbook production and distribution were both inefficient and costly aspects of the education system. However, by the mid-1990s the single, state-supported publisher of textbooks had gradually improved the quality and availability of its products.

### ***Higher Education***

Kyrgyzstan has twenty-six institutions of higher learning, seven of which are located in Bishkek, and seven of which are private. Approximately 4,700 teachers re-employed there, out of which only 150 have doctoral degrees and 1,715 are 'candidates', the level below a doctorate in the Soviet system. The language of instruction remained predominantly Russian in the mid-1990s, although the use of Kyrgyz is increasing. Long-term plans call for a more western style of university study, so that, for example, universities would begin to offer a baccalaureate degree. In 1992 President Akayev created a Slavic University in Bishkek to help Kyrgyzstan retain its population of educated Russians, for whom the increased "Kyrgyzzification" of education was a reason to emigrate. However a language reform initiative, designed to boost the use of Kyrgyz, was postponed by parliament in June 2003.

Unlike the situation in other countries in the region, the gender issue is reversed in Kyrgyzstan. The Constitution grants equality, but according to numerous data, women in Kyrgyzstan have education levels at least as high, if not higher, than men. It is a fact that Kyrgyzstan women are highly educated, and their level of professional preparation is equal to that of men in all spheres of the economy. A UN EFA report concludes that there is gender parity throughout.

Another bright spot in education reform, and one that has led to the reduction of corrupt practices, is the implementation of a transparent national test for all students seeking a government university scholarship.

In conclusion, Kyrgyzstan can be seen as the most open and co-operative of the Central Asian republics, despite a tumultuous year in 2002. However, the European Training Foundation considers that widespread poverty, pervasive corruption, and limited prospects for economic growth will all continue to negatively effect all social programmes and development, including the educational sector.

### **International actors involved in the education sector**

<b>World Bank</b>	Vocational education staff teaching as part of Social Protection Network Development programme
<b>USAID</b>	Support for legal reform, capacity building and democracy education, American University of Central Asia, together with the SOROS foundation
<b>Asian Development Bank</b>	Policy planning with focus on early childhood and basic education, vocational teaching system reforming, education management improvement, textbooks, teacher training, and rehabilitation of schools
<b>SOROS foundation</b>	School development, teacher training, learning materials development, capacity building, and overseas scholarships
<b>The Eurasia Foundation</b>	Work with USAID
<b>Save the Children Fund</b>	Promotion of education, focus on poor families
<b>UNDP</b>	Education sector planning and management teaching, establishment of National Testing Centre
<b>UNESCO</b>	Promotion of the Education For All strategy
<b>EFA</b>	Enterprise development
<b>Mercy Corps</b>	Implementation of the <i>Global Food for Education Programme</i> , awarded by the US Department for Agriculture. It aims at: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mobilising and strengthening community involvement in educational and</li> <li>2. Improving access to education throughout the country.</li> </ol> In addition, assists with rice distribution, vegetable oil and flour to every kindergarten and boarding school. Also sells some of the donated food commodities on the local market, the proceeds from which are used to fund small grants to educational institutions, and communities use these grants to repair and improve the infrastructure of schools, improve student access to clean water and sanitation, increase food security for students, or to purchase school equipment and supplies.
<b>UNICEF</b>	Focuses in particular on girls' education, and supports the incorporation of the Global Education Framework into the education system.

## EDUCATION IN KAZAKHSTAN

<b>Population</b>	16,763,795 (July 2003)		
<b>Population growth rate</b>	0.17% (2003)		
<b>Ethnic groups (1999 census)</b>	Kazakh 53.4% Russian 30% Ukrainian 3.7% Uzbek 2.5% German 2.4% Uighur 1.4% other 6.6%		
<b>Religions</b>	Muslim 47% Russian Orthodox 44% Protestant 2% other 7%		
<b>Languages (2001)</b>	Kazakh 64.4% (state language) Russian 95% (official, used in everyday business, designated the “language of interethnic communication”)		
<b>Literacy:</b>	<b>1985</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>Latest year</b>
<b>total pop.</b>	99%	97,5%	98,4% (2002)
<b>male</b>	-	-	99.1% (2002)
<b>female</b>	-	-	97.7% (2002)
<b>Net Primary School Enrolment<sup>7</sup> (%)</b>	-	-	88,68 (2000)
<b>Net Secondary School Enrolment (%)</b>	-	-	82,8 (2000)
<b>Public Education Expenditure (%GDP)</b>	6,6	6,6	4 (2000)

Source: CIA, *The World Fact Book*, August 2003.

### **Introduction**

During the Soviet period the country enjoyed high standards of education. Following independence in 1991, the situation fundamentally changed, and as happened in other CA countries, austerity measures adopted by the government resulted in major cuts in expenditure in education. This led to a deterioration in the quality of the system, a steep decline in the wages for teachers and often to delayed payment of r salaries. In 1993 more than 30.000 teachers, or about 1/7 of the 1990 teaching staff, left education, many of them to seek more lucrative employment.

In 1996 a Presidential Decree launched a *new state educational policy*, that placed priority on reforming the legislative basis and the management and financing of the educational system. In 2000 a new *State Programme on Education* was developed in order to define the main trends for education system development up to 2005. The main goals of this programme are

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<sup>7</sup> The *Gross Enrolment Ratio* is defined as the number of enrolments in a given cycle of education, divided by the total of the population in the aged group that is considered normal for that cycle of education. The *Net Enrolment Ratio* is similar, except that the numerator includes only enrolments within the education cycle considered and within the age group that is considered normal for that cycle; it gives a better indication of the actual proportion of the age group which is enrolled in a given cycle of education.

aimed at adjusting the education sector to its new economic environment; creating conditions for effective development of the national model of education system; and to providing wider access to the qualitative education at all levels of the system (pre-school, primary school, secondary general education, higher and post-graduate professional education).

The report on “*Main directions of development of the education system of Kazakhstan*”, presented to the Government by the Minister of Education on 22 July 2003, sets out the following long-term priorities for the education sector:

- development and publication of textbooks and training materials, development of curricula and introduction of new courses in senior high school programmes;
- introduction of 12-year secondary education (from the current 11years);
- computerisation of secondary schools
- elaboration and introduction of a system of external independent assessment of academic achievements of students in secondary and higher education;
- achievement of a full international recognition of the higher education structure.

Over the past years reforms have resulted in the country achieving some positive results. These include the beginning of the decentralisation of the education management, the diversification of funding, the development of innovative education institutions, and progress by the private sector in the education field. Nevertheless, there is still the need to further modernise the education system, including completing decentralisation, adjusting the content of education, further developing the planning and the financing system of education in order to ensure an adequate budget for this sector, and to raising both teachers salaries and their professional qualifications.

### **Access to education**

The Constitution of 1995 specifies that education through secondary school is mandatory and free, and that citizens have a further right to compete for free education in the Republic’s institutions of higher education. To this end a limited number of state scholarships are granted each academic year on a competitive basis. The academic institutions can be broken down as follows:

- Public general education schools make up the largest part of the educational system, with about 3 million students. About 23,7% of the schools are located in urban areas and the remainder in rural areas. However, the number of students in urban areas is almost the same as in rural areas. There are about 258.100 teachers in general education schools.
- Private, paid education is permitted, but remains subject to state control and supervision. The number of private schools is continuously growing: in 1999 it stood at 199 schools and about 16.000 students; and 4.100 teachers are engaged in private schools.
- Equal access to education is still not fully ensured, especially at the university level. For example, the majority of higher education institutions need to be paid for, and so the possibility to receive proper education depends on the individual’s financial resources. Each academic year the State grants scholarships, but the number of grants is limited and they are offered on a competitive basis only.

### **Access for minorities**

Education in schools is conducted in 7 languages. Data from 2000 refers: 3.366 Kazakh language, 2.390 Russian, 2.017 Russian/Kazakh, 78 Uzbek, 13 Uigur, 3 Tadjik, 1 Ukrainian and 1 German language schools. Studies of 14 languages have been organised in compact minority settlements.

## **Structure of the education system<sup>8</sup>**

### **Pre-school (from 5 to 6 years)**

This level has been one of the fields most affected by the deterioration of education in the years after independence, and only recently has there been an increase in both schools and attendance by children. Data from the 1999-2000 academic year refers to 1.089 institutions and 124.800 children. The pre-school organisation differs by the age of the attendees (nurseries are available for children under the age of 3; kindergartens for children aged 5; and there are some combined nurseries-kindergartens as well), and by the purpose (general development, learning difficulty, care and health treatment etc).

The pre-school programme followed by the government includes preparation of younger age children for academic programmes by the promotion of their intellectual and individual development, as well as compulsory pre-school preparation for children starting from the age of 5, who are not attending pre-school institutions; this involves some 200,000 children.

### **Secondary general school (from 6 to 17 years)**

Despite economic difficulties, the secondary education system, in general, has been preserved and is developing. Secondary general education is acquired stage by stage under educational programmes embracing three levels: primary (1-4 grades), basic (5-9 grades), senior (10-11 or 12 grades), each divided into continued general education and professional education. The above levels can function together within one general education institution, or separately in a primary or a basic general school. Recently a number of new secondary schools, specialised schools, gymnasiums, lyceums, linguistic and technical gymnasiums have been founded. There are now 8,309 general education schools with 1,236,000 students in grade 1 to 4, and 2,012,000 students in grades 5 to 11. Secondary professional education is offered in special professional or technical schools, lyceums or colleges and vocational schools. 306 vocational schools and lyceums operate in the Republic, and there are 86,000 students attending them. Colleges that provide secondary vocational education number 285; 173 are state-run and 112 are in a non-state form of ownership.

### **Higher Education**

At present there are universities, academies, institutes higher schools and higher colleges. Higher education comprises three main levels:

- Basic higher education, that provides the fundamentals of the chosen field of study and leads to the award of a Bachelors Degree;
- Specialised higher education, after which students are awarded by Specialist's Diploma;
- Scientific Pedagogical higher education, which leads to a Masters Degree.

The system of higher education comprises 164 institutions, 47 of which are state-run and 117 are private.

### **Post-graduate Education**

Principal forms of this kind of education are *aspirantura* (candidate of science programme) and *doctorantura* (doctor of science programme).

With the adoption of the laws on education and higher education, a private sector has been established and several private institutions have been licensed.

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<sup>8</sup> Statistics provided by Soros Educational Advising Centre, Almaty, 2001.



### **Quality of education**

Implementation of the majority of reforms to improve the quality of education has been slow, mainly due to funding, poor managerial and strategic planning capacities, but also because of a lack of staff training opportunities and a deficiency in co-ordination and agreement among the involved ministries and departments.

However, a number of positive steps have been taken to reform the contents of the somewhat standardised and ideological teaching and education programmes. Curricula have been widened, with subjects including world literature, cultural science, social psychology, and languages (particularly English) included. Despite these positive achievements, the quality of education leaves much room for improvement especially at the higher level. There remains a lack of specialists with new ideas, and students are unable to study properly aspects of business administration. Given the country's burgeoning oil and gas industry, this is a very relevant sector of the Kazakh economy that will need such expertise if future generations are to manage it properly. Sadly, corruption is becoming common practice both in private and public universities, with bribes being accepted to ensure accreditation, licensing and certification. It is a fact that budget cuts over the past years have forced institutions to find their own financing sources, but one of the main reasons for corruption still remains the low salary of teachers.

The qualifications and the professional level of primary school teachers is unsatisfactory. There is an increase in the number of teachers who do not have a teaching qualification or background, despite the fact that primary school teachers are required by law to have a higher or secondary vocational training in teaching. This can be explained in part by the fact that, in addition to graduates of teacher training institutions, some teachers who resigned in the past in order to seek a better paid job have returned to teaching. There is, therefore, the need to create the necessary conditions for undereducated teachers at primary schools to achieve the required education on a part-time basis.

Within the framework of the State Programme on Education, the introduction of 12-year secondary education is seen as a necessary step in order to improve the quality of education and to meet modern international requirements. There is, however, concern about the negative effect that the new system might have on rural schools, where there is a lack of schoolchildren, and on the public budget, since this reform would cost an additional 5 billion tenge a year over the next 10 years. Moreover, while a 12-year secondary education system would reduce the number of high schools, it would require a significant increase in the education budget due to the need to construct new vocational schools and colleges.

### **International actors involved in the education sector**

<b>The Asian Development Bank (ADB)</b>	Since 1994 ADB has supported the Ministry of Education with technical assistance and loans directed to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Educational, rehabilitation and management improvement</li><li>2. Education and training sector</li><li>3. Strengthening educational administration and management at the central and local levels and basic education, distance education</li><li>4. Access of remote low-income groups to education</li><li>5. Computer software developments</li></ol> In addition, a new 5-year project (\$ 10 million) on Primary and Secondary Education Development has been recently planned. Its
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	<p>goals:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To support capacity building of local education administrations for education management and finance</li> <li>2. Quality improvements, including curricula development</li> <li>3. Teacher training and quality assurance systems</li> <li>4. Facilities development</li> <li>5. Liberalisation of educational publishing</li> <li>6. Provision of learning materials</li> <li>7. Integration of children with disabilities into mainstream education.</li> </ol>
<b>The European Union</b>	<p>Within the framework of its <b>TACIS, Tempus and Bistro programmes</b>, the EU has invested the equivalent to \$17.2 million in the reform of social sector and education. Grants were given to the Kazakh Institute of Management and Economic Research, the Diplomatic Academy and the Ministry of Education.</p> <p>In 2002 the TACIS/Bistro project “<b>Dissemination of vocational Training and Labour Market Reform Tools</b>” assisted the Republican Institute for the Training and Management, Scientific and Teaching Personnel for education in strengthening the reform process of the vocational education and training. Its task:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To develop a package of training handbooks on the evaluation of the quality of educational management</li> <li>2. To hold information seminars to test new methodological tools in practice.</li> </ol>
<b>The Soros Kazakhstan Foundation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Between 1995 and 2000 it funded various education programmes (total amount \$8 million).</li> <li>• Recently it has worked with the Higher Education Support Programme and Soros Foundations in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to form the Central Asian Resource Centre, which aims: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To reform the social sciences and humanities in CA’s higher education system</li> <li>2. To compile information and to act as a resource and forum for CA students, faculties and researchers.</li> </ol> </li> <li>• Another project is “Dialogue with society”. It aims at facilitating co-operation between Kazakhstan’s Ministry of Education and the academic community.</li> </ul>
<b>UNESCO</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Its top priority is the modernisation and reinforcement of the national system of education, within the framework of the Education Programme for All, which gives an opportunity to evaluate continuing educational reforms in the country. In April 2003, the Ministry of Education approved the National EFA Plan of Action for 2003-2012.</li> <li>2. Active work is being conducted to support special education programmes within the project on the promotion of basic education for children with special needs.</li> </ol>
<b>The Aga Khan Development Network</b>	<p>Has been present in the country since the early 1990s and it is engaged in:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Creating the University of Central Asia (UCA)</li> <li>2. Establishing two additional campuses in Tekeli, in the</li> </ol>

	Taldykorgan area of southeastern Kazakhstan. The UCA was established by international treaty between Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and the Aga Khan in August 2000.
<b>USAID</b>	<p>Its activity:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Support to reforms of teaching methods</li> <li>2. Promote tolerance and democratic ideas from kindergartens through secondary schools</li> <li>3. Civic education programmes for secondary schools (350 schools used the USAID-funded civic textbooks for 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades)</li> <li>4. Support to extra-curricular activities (civic education courses, student local government days and democracy summer camps, anti-corruption courses for university students).</li> </ol>
<b>The British Council</b>	<p>The BC has been developing and managing projects on behalf of the UK Department for International Development in the education sector. Current activities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. English language training to corporate clients</li> <li>2. It works with institutions in the field of teachers education</li> <li>3. It collaborates with the Ministry of Education on textbook development and curricula reform.</li> </ol>

## EDUCATION IN TURKMENISTAN

<b>Population (July 2003)</b>	4,775,544
<b>Population growth rate</b>	1.82% (2003)
<b>Ethnic groups (1995 census)</b>	Turkmen 77% Uzbek 9.2% Russian 6.7% Kazakh 2% other 5.1%
<b>Religions</b>	Muslim 89% Eastern Orthodox 9% unknown 2%
<b>Languages</b>	Turkmen 72% Russian 12% Uzbek 9% other 7%
<b>Literacy (age 15 and over that can read and write) (1989)</b>	Total pop. 98% male 99% female 97%

Source: CIA, *The World Fact Book*, August 2003.

### **Introduction**

In the years since independence, education in the country has been constantly changing and undergoing a reform process, mainly aimed at modifying the previous Soviet style ideological system into a modern and more internationally based one. Over the past years though these reforms have not arrested the country's education system from falling to a level that is now far below from what it used to be.

A major reason for this is that the government has not been allocating adequate resources to education because this sector was not seen as a priority. In addition, the national building policy launched by President Niyazov required the Turkmen language to be the only official one to be used. This impacted heavily on the education sector due to the change in the language of instruction, not least because textbooks in Turkmen language were not initially available, and are still in a short supply. There are also insufficient professional translators to undertake quality translations from foreign languages, and particularly from Russian, into Turkmen. The result is that there is still the need for textbooks in Russian, and a large number of them are provided by Russia as a form of payment for gas and oil.

Another factor that has contributed to the degradation of the education system is the introduction of historical, cultural and moral priorities imposed by the government on Turkmen society. This leads to the assumption that education, and in particular higher education, is less important in an environment, where currently practical knowledge is seen as more relevant than that gained through education. In recent years too the accession to higher education has become more restricted, since a presidential rule requires that people entering higher education institutions must have worked for two years in the field of study that they intend to attend at University.

With regard to the length of mandatory schooling, whilst in Russia it was raised from 10 to 11 grades, in 1993 a new Education Law reduced the number of years of compulsory

schooling from 10 to 9. Only Russian schools continued to provide 10 years of secondary education, but in 2002 this has been phased out too.

As can be seen, the situation in the field of education is a cause for concern, and there is real need for a substantial reform process in this sector if it's the quality and availability of education in the country are to be brought up to common international standards.

### ***Access to education***

The right of access to free education is guaranteed to every citizen by the Turkmen Constitution, and the Law on Education, adopted in 1993, sets out the constitutional requirement for free and equal access to education. However, in practice, full access to higher education has been restricted in recent years due to a number of policies which are discussed later in this paper.

### ***Access for minorities***

During the Soviet system, access to education for minorities was possible as a number of schools, particularly those catering for Kazakh and Uzbek minorities, provided education in the language of the minority residing in a particular area. Many of these schools in rural areas were managed by the local collective farm councils, but after independence this system was not replaced. During the past years most of these schools have been required to provide education in Turkmen.

### ***Structure of the education system***

#### ***Pre-school years (from 2-7 years)***

Pre-schools are not mandatory and provide a basic preparation for the following education level. The use of the Russian language in this phase is disappearing.

#### ***Secondary General Education (from 7 to 16 years)***

This comprises two levels: primary (grades 1-3) and secondary (grades 4-9 ). There are approximately 60 secondary schools in Ashgabat. Since 1992, following a bilateral agreement between Turkmenistan and Turkey, children have the opportunity to attend Turkish schools (there are at least 20 operating in different provinces of the country). Admissions are competitive, which restricts the number of pupils, and this system is flexibly supervised by the School's Directorate. These schools have become more popular due to the fact that being staffed with teachers with an international background, they are seen as offering a better education, in particular in foreign languages.

The only secondary school remaining that still employs the Russian Federation educational curriculum and its 11 years education system, operates in Ashgabat. It is a private school, approximately 500 children attend it, and it is financially supported by the Russian Embassy. In Ashgabat there is also an American school that provides education, but only for to 2 or 3 classes.

### ***Higher Education***

According to a recent presidential decree, graduates from secondary schools are not eligible for higher education unless they have at least two years of work experience (mostly non-paid). This two-year time gap between secondary and higher education is meant to prepare students for the field of study they have chosen. Young males have an additional two-year gap, since they have to complete a compulsory conscription period. Considering the current

poor economic situation of the country, which has led to a high unemployment rate, the search for a job is not always successful, with the result that students can be unemployed for a longer period, or be forced to take up any job available. There is also the need to take in account that in order to enrol in higher education institutions, students are required to undergo a selection process. The process consists of a State examination in Turkmen language, and this also includes a special exam on “Rukhnama”, the spiritual book published by President Niyazov. Access for successful student is still though not fully guaranteed, since there are limited number of attendees each year (the number of admissions authorised for 2003 has been increased from 3,480 to 3,920. Quotas for young people to study specific professions required in certain regions of the country have also been planned. Higher education was free in a great number of cases and the government used to grant to each student a stipend allowance of approximately. 800.000 manats (equivalent to about 40 US\$). However, there is no information to support the statement that higher education is now no longer free.

In 2002, President Niyazov launched further new reforms, according to which only two academic years at a university are to be devoted to regular classes and theoretical teaching, while the remaining two years are aimed at providing students with practical knowledge. The new plan also aims at establishing positions of ‘state trustees’, tasked with controlling educational activities and supporting the practical implementation of the President’s new state policy. Niyazov himself has assumed the trusteeship over the Mahtumkuli Turkmen State University, the Turkmen State Institute of Culture, the Turkmen National Conservatory and the State Fine Art Academy.

Universities continue to offer several fields of study, but a number of courses have been cancelled and replaced with classes of ‘Rukhnama’, aimed at providing moral and political guidance to the population of Turkmenistan, as well as the Policies of President Niyazov, including his policy of neutrality.

Currently there are 17 higher educational institutions, but during the years since independence the number of students attending has decreased by four times.

In Ashgabat, the International Turkmen-Turkish University opened in 1996. It has good facilities and equipment, and approximately 50% of its annual intake come from the 20 existing Turkmen-Turkish schools. It has 250 students, but as yet the government has not considered a further expansion.

### **Quality of education**

The quality of education provided to most students is seen as worsening. In addition to the reduction of the overall basic schooling period by one year, the dismissal of thousands of teachers (in 2000, the Cabinet of Ministers reduced the number of university teachers by 12,000<sup>9</sup>), and the virtual impossibility for non-Turkmen to gain admission to institutions of higher education, the education system now depends on the policy of “*turkmenisation of the educational system*”. As a result, not only has the official language of instruction changed, but there has also been a partial, or total removal of, or a distortion of, subjects such as English language, political science, history and philosophy. Humanities subjects that do not have direct relation to a student’s speciality, as well as abstract lectures seen as far from real

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<sup>9</sup> According to non-official figures.

life, have been taken out. Currently Turkmen students will be educated, starting from kindergarten, by reading “Rukhnama”, and which is still a compulsory subject in University.

As previously mentioned, the Turkmen educational system has lost its integrated educational chain, from kindergarten to –school to-university. This has come about because since July 2003 graduates from secondary school are required to work for two years before being able to enter into an institute for higher education. The result is that after successful completion of these two (practical) years, and in the case of boys, completion of military service, students may submit their application to continue their studies. But it appears that even if selected the education standards provided in universities are not high due in no small way to the fact that university and secondary school teachers, as well as the students themselves, do not have access to the latest information sources, including the internet. In addition, universities and school libraries do not receive the latest literature and reference books to assist either. Several years ago, the government also referred parts of the National Academy of Sciences and many other research institutions to the respective branches of Turkmen economy, and the usefulness of this decision is very doubtful. There is also a lack of state-supported programmes aimed at computerising the educational facilities and providing access to the internet for educational purposes.

In an effort to seek a better education, many students travelled abroad in the past, but since February 2003 this opportunity has been considerably reduced, for a presidential decree instructed the Central Bank of Turkmenistan to cease the favourable official rate of manatees into hard currency for Turkmen students intending to study abroad. As a result, these students have to pay for such tuition of their private means. This new rule has already forced a great number of parents to end the studies of their children abroad and to make them return to Turkmenistan. The new measure clearly intends to discourage Turkmen citizens from studying abroad, and on several official occasions President Niyazov has stated that diplomas obtained abroad will not be recognised.

The best opportunity to receive a good education is now seen as by attending either a Turkish school, or the one remaining Russian school in Ashgabat, and then later continuing abroad.

In conclusion, it is vital that the education system undertakes reforms that will ensure adequate budget allocation, access to multi-language education, liberalisation of teaching methods and access to foreign education facilities.

### ***International actors involved in the region***

<p><b>USAID</b></p>	<p>In January 2003 USAID started to implement its <b><i>Basic Education Sector Strengthening Programme</i></b>, which is structured to work at all levels of the Turkmen education system, with a targeted number of schools and communities selected as pilot sites to measure the impact of the full range of activities. The programme plans to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Use training-of-trainer models, in order to provide curriculum and methodological training to the maximum number of teachers;</li> <li>2. Co-ordinate, whenever possible, ongoing education activities (e.g. civic education, Street Law, Junior Achievement, Step by Step, Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking and health</li> </ol>
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	<p>education component of the Sports and Health Education Programme) that are conducted under other strategic objectives, with the basic education pilot schools, in order to ensure access to these curriculum and methodology innovations;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Establish a data collection on gender issues in schools, which could be use in the development of future activities designed to address gender issues in basic education.</li> </ol> <p>For the year 2004 USAID plans to continue solidifying the activities begun in 2003, with a particular focus on:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Girls' education;</li> <li>2. Improvement in in-service teacher training;</li> <li>3. Improvement in the quality and relevance of curricula;</li> <li>4. Increase of parents and community involvement in schools;</li> <li>5. Strengthening institutional, management, and technical capacity at all levels of the education system;</li> <li>6. Improvement of school infrastructures.</li> </ol> <p>In February 2003, under the Academy <i>of Development Through Education Programme</i>, free of charge computer classes were organised in education centre Bilimli Nesil, in Ashgabat, for child-orphans.</p>
<b>UNICEF</b>	<p>In order to develop the concept of Global Education (to educate the “whole person” by addressing the intellectual, emotional, physical, moral, and spiritual dimensions of the learner in a comprehensive approach), UNICEF, since December 2002, has organised three seminars. The last one was held in July 2003, in Ashgabat, and focussed on the practical implementation of the Global Education principles, through the new <i>Child-Friendly Learning Approach</i>, which plans to use interactive learning methods that encourage co-operation, discussions and active participation. On-going monitoring and evaluation activities are planned to be undertaken. The project is expected to have a number of positive effects within the Turkmen educational system, namely:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To enhance the learning environment by enriching and diversifying the range of learning/teaching methods employed in schools</li> <li>2. To enhance teacher professionalism by giving teachers new skills, a new conception of their role, fuller recognition of student potential and a revitalised belief in the significance of their calling.</li> </ol>
<b>TACIS's educational programs in Turkmenistan</b>	<p>The European Union has launched a programme known as Technical Assistance for CIS (TACIS), to assist post-Soviet states. One of the main elements of the TACIS is in the area of educational . For 2002 and 2003 TACIS in Turkmenistan has been implementing three educational projects. The project titled '<i>The World Standard Education at Turkmenistan University</i>' is aimed at the creation of a sustainable university management organisation providing extensive training in Internet usage to five Turkmen universities. The other project, '<i>Turkmen Economy Training Centre</i>' – is offering development courses at European Universities for Turkmen</p>



	<p>professors (staff members) who will adapt and develop 6 training courses for different target groups in their own country. The <i>‘Professional Language Training System for Turkmenistan’</i> project is targeted at establishing a national Centre for Interpreter and Translator training at the Turkmen Azadi Institute, and to develop a curriculum for interpreter and translator training in languages for specific purposes in fields essential to the Turkmen economy. The TACIS is also launching the regional educational project <i>‘Development of International MSc Programme on Environment and Water Resources Management in Central Asia’</i> in order to improve the regional co-operation on environment and water resources management and to develop an internationally recognised MSc programme.</p>
<b>United States Peace Corps</b>	<p>Has been active in Turkmenistan since 1992. Volunteers</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teach English to young people in towns and villages</li> <li>2. Support the work of the local English teachers</li> <li>3. Promote health education in schools</li> <li>4. Organise summer camps for students.</li> </ol>
<b>Mercy Corps</b>	<p>Its <i>Infrastructures Projects</i> include refurbishing and re-equipping schools</p>

## EDUCATION IN UZBEKISTAN

<b>Population (July 2003)</b>	25,981,647		
<b>Population growth rate (2003)</b>	1.63%		
<b>Ethnic groups (1996)</b>	Uzbek 80% Russian 5.5% Tajik 5% Kazakh 3% Karakalpak 2.5% Tatar 1.5% other 2.5%		
<b>Religions</b>	Muslim 88% (mostly Sunnis) Eastern Orthodox 9% other 3%		
<b>Languages</b>	Uzbek 74.3% Russian 14.2% Tajik 4.4% other 7.1%		
<b>Literacy (2003)</b>	Total pop. 99.3% male 99.6% female 99%		
<b>Public Education Expenditure (%GDP)</b>	6,7		
	<b>1991/92</b>	<b>1995/96</b>	<b>2000/01</b>
<b>Pre-school Gross Enrolment Ratio (%)</b>	34,6	24,3	17,6
<b>Including non-traditional pre-schools (%)</b>	-	-	27,4
<b>Primary School Gross Enrolment Ratio (%)</b>	88,8	88,4	97,4
<b>Net Enrolment Ratio (%)</b>	87,6	87,4	94,8
<b>Secondary School Gross Enrolment Ratio (%)</b>	66,9	51,6	48,3
<b>Net Enrolment Ratio (%)</b>	57,3	45,6	34,8
<b>Higher Education Gross Enrolment Ratio (%)</b>	14,3	7,5	6,4

Source: CIA, *The World Fact Book*, August 2003.

### **Introduction**

Reflecting its Soviet legacy, Uzbekistan inherited a relatively well-developed education system, with a high level of participation, schools that were relatively well provisioned and maintained, and a level of education that raised overall literacy rates.

In the late 80s, the situation began to unravel, and with independence in 1991 it fundamentally changed which led to a rapid decline in this sector. Many educational facilities, which had been financed and managed by public enterprises, were closed or transferred to state control, while schools at all levels faced funding shortfalls, especially in rural areas. The government's initial response to these developments focussed on reducing expenditure needs and diversifying sources of financing. The duration of compulsory

education was reduced from 11 years to 9, and the education financing system was diversified, through decentralising the management of most education programmes, by requiring parents to purchase textbooks (previously provided by the government) and by instituting a programme of cost recovery for students in specialised secondary and higher education.

In 1997 the government adopted a more pro-active approach to transitional challenges in the education sector and launched a new education reform programme, *The National Programme for Personnel Training*, which is to be developed in three stages and completed in 2005 at the earliest. In order to reorient the education system to the needs of a market economy and to meet the international education standards, it planned:

- To increase public education expenditure;
- To extend the duration of compulsory education from 9 to 12 years<sup>10</sup>;
- To restructure education programmes at the secondary and tertiary levels;
- To replace the two-year programme for complete secondary education with a new three-year academic *lycea*, to be linked to universities and staffed by university graduates;
- To transform the vocational secondary *technikums* into professional colleges at the secondary level;
- To regroup higher education programmes into the Anglo-Saxon model of Bachelor and Masters degree, while expanding programmes in computer sciences, economics and English language;
- To develop modern curricula and more student-centred practices, improving the quality of textbooks and of pre-service and in-service teacher training.

Over the last years, the national reform programme has seen the country achieve impressive gains in the education sector. However, there is still the need to modernise the system, raise its coverage, remove disparities in attendance between regions and income groups, raise the wages of teachers and improve their qualification and professional levels.

## **Access to Education**

### **Access for minorities**

At present, over 10% of schools provide education in seven national languages of ethnic minorities in general and secondary schools. In Karakalpakstan it is provided in the Karakalpak and Russian languages.

However, schools for minority children are at a disadvantage in terms of availability of instructional materials and textbooks in national languages, as well as with teacher qualifications. Opportunities for further education are also reduced for post-compulsory education and universities, where only Uzbek, Russian and Karakalpak remain as the languages used .

### **Gender equality of access**

According to the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, all citizens, both in the urban and in the rural areas, have the right to free, equal and obligatory primary and secondary education. The Government has made substantial progress in closing gender gaps in basic

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<sup>10</sup> Starting from the school year 2001/02, students are now required to complete twelve years of schooling.

education in almost all regions, the only exception being Kashkadarya, where the lowest gender disparity is also combined with the lowest attendance rate.

Significant differences, however, still remain at higher levels of education, particularly in universities. In 1999, the percentage of female students in undergraduate higher education was 38%, and in graduate higher education programmes just 30%.

### ***School attendance***

Official data on enrolments may overstate the actual attendance, primarily because of the frequent tendency to over-register enrolments as a means of maintaining existing schools and teaching positions. Therefore, official data may not reflect the number of children actually benefiting from education, for it is understood that there is significant non-attendance by children who are officially enrolled in school. The main reasons for school non-attendance can be detected in both demand and supply of education. These reasons include falling incomes, lower perceived benefits and higher costs, particularly from poor households, and on the supply side from the closure of facilities and deterioration in quality of them. Non-attendance varies considerably with age, areas (the highest levels are registered in the rural areas), region of residence, poverty level of the household and, for higher education, additionally by gender. There are various forms of non-attendance. Children may never start school at all (more typically in rural areas) or they may start but not stay in school through to the end of the compulsory cycle - this is particularly common). In rural areas children frequently miss a crucial part of the school year, at the beginning and at the end, because of the need for children to help in the autumn harvest or spring planting.

### ***Religious education***

The amendments to the law on religion, adopted on 5 May 1999, have effectively outlawed the teaching of Islam, both in private teaching and in mosques. Formal religious education takes place only in a limited network of state-controlled institutions of higher education, namely the Tashkent Islamic Institute and the Tashkent Islamic University. This limited network is not sufficient for the demand, and has led to an increase in the instance of bribery to obtain admission. As a result of outlawing religious instruction, an old tradition of informal (and illegal) learning has re-emerged. As a consequence of these illegal underground classes they have been placed alongside secret study groups run by Hizb ut-Tahrir or other extremist groups, whose growth is seen as a consequence of the ban on religious education.

### ***Education system***

#### ***Pre-school education***

Since independence, enrolment has dropped drastically (from 35% in 1991/92 to 16% in 1999/2000), although it did increase in 2001/02 to 20%. These declines are reflected in both urban and rural areas, but they are particularly steep in rural areas. Although the government is encouraging various approaches to care for young children, the majority of them between the ages of 0-3 are cared for at home. Others are sometimes cared for in nurseries, and children between 3-5 can attend kindergartens. Recent years have seen the development of networks of various non-traditional forms of pre-school education, such as educational centres, independent groups under kindergartens and schools, short term kindergartens, and Sunday schools. When these are taken in account, the coverage of children by pre-schools in

2002 was about 27,4%, and data taken from the 2000 records 6,704 schools catering for these ages<sup>11</sup>.

### **Basic (grade 1 to 9) and Secondary Education**

While there has been an increase in basic education coverage, data shows a decline in the secondary sector, with a widening gap between gross and net enrolment ratios. This implies an increase in the number of over-age students. This is likely to have been the result either of higher than reported repetition of studies by individuals, or due to late starts in the system by others. The source of this gap warrants further investigation.

In 2000, students in primary schools (grades 1-4) numbered 2,598,000, and in grades from 5 to 11 the figure was 3,399,000.

### **Higher Education**

The fall of enrolments in this sector presents a stark contrast to the pattern in other transition countries. This might have been accelerated by the introduction of fees and the fall in incomes of many during the transition period. It is a matter of concern because it implies that the country's competitiveness is declining, when compared to other countries in the region. In 2000 the number of universities was 61.

### **Quality of education**

Quality is difficult to assess, mainly because data on quality indicators is not available. Over the last years shrinking education budgets were associated with a tendency to maintain jobs of teachers and other educational staff, even in the face of falling workloads and to the detriment of vital expenditure needed to maintain and update teaching and learning materials, as well as school infrastructures. Funding shortages have been severe, especially in primary and secondary education sectors. As a result, the quality of teaching and the condition of schools has deteriorated in both rural and urban areas. The National Programme for Personnel Training aims at improving quality and relevance at all levels of the education system, but concerns exist over its ability to have a lasting improvement on quality. So far more attention has been paid to the hardware requirements of the programme, such as investment requirements of new facilities, rather than to curricula development, teacher training and wage incentives. Further concerns exist over its equity implication because since the programme focuses on upgrading secondary and higher education<sup>12</sup>, there is the risk that resources might be drawn away from basic education.

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<sup>11</sup> Sources: National Statistics Office of Uzbekistan.

<sup>12</sup> The investment costs alone in this sector are estimated by the Government at 4.5 billion US\$.

### **International actors involved in the education sector**

<p><b>Asian Development Bank (ADB)</b></p>	<p>Since 1994 ADB has been the leading external agency. It provides broad support to improve the relevance and quality of education, and to strengthen national capacities to plan, design, manage and monitor sector reforms. The main targets of its activity, which has also an antipoverty focus, are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Compulsory education</li> <li>2. Support for early childhood development.</li> </ol> <p>Projects that have been implemented and planned are the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Basic Education textbook development and Senior Secondary Education</i> (2 projects for 3 loans totalling 97\$ million);</li> <li>2. <i>8 Technical Assistance</i> programmes of 4\$ million to carry out reviews of and capacity building in education finance, basic education and senior secondary education</li> <li>3. <i>One regional TA</i> programme for 750,000\$ to facilitate exchange of experiences among the CA republics in managing the implementation of education reforms</li> <li>4. <i>One Education sector development programme</i> is being processed to support comprehensive reforms in compulsory education (105.5\$ million)</li> <li>5. <i>One1 textbook sector development programme</i>, planned for 2004 and another one for 2005 to continue support for comprehensive overall sector reforms.</li> </ol>
<p><b>European Union-TACIS</b></p>	<p>EU assistance has been directed to the ministries of higher and public education for the Restructuring of the Education System. Its activities include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Education planning, financing and management systems;</li> <li>2. Inter-ministry co-ordination regarding policies and horizontal issues;</li> <li>3. Strengthening of management training in Fergana and Samarkand (2 projects)</li> <li>4. Establishment of new business schools at the State University of Fergana and in 3 institutions in Samarkand;</li> <li>5. Restructuring of Teaching Methodology for History Course in Higher Education</li> <li>6. Assistance to Reform of Vocational Education.</li> </ol>
<p><b>USAID</b></p>	<p>Is the largest bilateral donor and the third largest overall donor in the country. It carries out a wide range of activities, aimed at:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Improving the basic education sector</li> <li>2. Providing scholarships and fellowships both in the US and in CA</li> <li>3. Developing teacher-training programmes.</li> </ol> <p>A new <i>Basic Education Programme</i> has been approved for 2003-2006. Its goals are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To increase enrolment and graduation rates</li> <li>2. To increase parent's satisfaction with the education their children receive by improving educational quality.</li> </ol> <p>This programme is been implemented by the <b>Academy for Educational Development</b>, together with the <b>Open Society Institute</b> and local <b>Soros Foundations</b>.</p>

<b>World Concern Humanitarian Aid</b>	Has been providing children's educational material and donation of used computers.
<b>Mercy Corps</b>	Infrastructure projects include the repair of a school shared by villages on both sides of the Tajik-Kyrgyz border.
<b>Open Society Institute Assistance Fond (OSIAF)</b>	Is an international humanitarian organisation that pursues the following goals within the education sector: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To assist innovations in education</li> <li>2. To improve the quality of teaching humanities</li> <li>3. To raise the level of knowledge of man's rights</li> </ol>